

## **bound by all the rest by heartheartbeatbeat, socknonny**

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**Summary:**

When the Upside Down infects Steve and Billy with a curse, they find they can't leave each other's side. Even worse--they realise they don't want to.

## **bound by all the rest**

### **Author's Note:**

We love this trope and hope you do too!!

Billy has a long list of things he hates about Hawkins: the people, the girls, the air. But somewhere near the top of that list is the woods. There's something wrong with the woods here, something to do with deadened air and shadows as dark as pits in the ground. It's inhuman. Billy doesn't say it out loud, but he's fucking terrified of the woods. And now he's walking into them, following Steve Harrington, for no reason other than he's clearly lost any sanity he once possessed.

Something cracks beneath Steve's foot and he jumps half a foot in the air, spinning around in search of an enemy that isn't there. Billy ducks behind a tree; the last thing he needs right now is to get caught stalking Steve in the middle of nowhere. He can't explain what he's doing out here to himself, so he sure as shit can't explain it to anyone else.

Steve turns back around and continues his cautious trek into the darkening trees. It's something about Steve's walk, Billy thinks, that made him follow Steve out here. It's the way Steve looks more on edge than should be possible for someone about to graduate high school. It's the way he looks how Billy feels all the goddamn time—at least, when he has the balls to acknowledge it.

And not only that... There has always been something about Steve that gets under his skin like no other. It makes it difficult to act normal around him, and in the privacy of Billy's own head, he knows exactly why that is. He can't do anything to change it, and while it still makes him fear being around Steve—it always has—it also makes him long to be near him.

Not even the wind is strong enough to break through the trees this deep into the woods, and the world around them is eerily silent. Billy walks extra slow to make sure Steve doesn't catch him, and he's beginning to feel like a creep. Every hair on the back of his neck is standing up, and when combined with his slowly dawning sense of

guilt it's starting to send the familiar prickle of anger across his skin. Admittedly, it doesn't take much to do that, particularly these days.

He shoves it down, fumbling for a cigarette to distract himself. He doesn't light it, of course—the smoke would be a dead give away—but it soothes him to have it in his mouth nonetheless. He grips his leather jacket closer and slinks after Steve, who has just climbed over a fallen log into a shadowed clearing.

"I swear it was here," Steve mutters under his breath, just loud enough for Billy to hear. "It was right *here*. Where did it go?" He starts to spin in a slow circle, studying the ground at his feet. "Gotta tell Hop." He pulls a face. "Gotta find it first. *Then* I've gotta tell Hop."

Billy frowns, his jaw so slack as he watches Steve's sudden stumble into madness that the cigarette nearly falls out of his mouth. He flinches and catches it before it drops, then goes back to staring at Steve.

Something must catch Steve's eye, because he suddenly halts his odd pacing and stares at a spot on the ground. He's mostly in shadow, but his face is lit by just enough of the fading sunlight that Billy can see his expression. He looks petrified, which has to be a trick of the light, because all Billy can see on the ground is a bit of black goo. Like tar or something. Hardly anything to worry about.

Maybe Billy can't see it properly. He edges a little closer, but he forgets to watch where he's going, and his boot comes straight down on a stick. In the quiet of the clearing, the snap is as loud as a gunshot. Steve jumps again, head whipping up and eyes landing immediately on Billy.

"What the—" He breaks off and shakes his head, frowning. "What the hell are you doing here? Are you lost?"

Fuck it. At least he can smoke that cigarette now. Billy steps into the clearing and reaches for his lighter.

"Depends, pretty boy," he says, watching the flame lick the end of the cigarette. "Do you remember the way back?"

Steve is still frowning. "Of course."

Billy smiles. "Then no, I'm not lost." He jerks his head towards the thing on the ground, which is definitely just a puddle of goo. "What the shit is that?"

Steve's eyes widen as he turns back to the goo, like he'd forgotten it was there. "Shit," he breathes, holding out his hand toward Billy. "Stay back."

He and Steve aren't exactly friends now, not even close. But they're not... whatever they were. They nod in passing in the hallway. They don't punch each other on sight. Billy thinks that's progress. He fully acknowledges he is the only reason they need that sort of progress at all, but that doesn't make it any less of an accomplishment.

Still, they're not friends, and the way Steve is looking at him right now, like maybe Billy is in danger and maybe Steve wants to fix that, sets Billy's teeth on edge. It's a lie. Steve doesn't care if Billy is in danger.

Billy snorts. "Like hell." He takes another step closer. "What is it?"

"Seriously." Steve moves between Billy and the thing on the ground. "It's not safe."

There is silence for a few seconds as Billy tries to work out exactly how he's meant to reply to that. Eventually, he points to the goo, raising one eyebrow.

"That?" he questions, too incredulous to even remember to sound scathing. "That isn't safe?" He squints. "What, is it flammable?" He leans closer.

He can't help but notice the way Steve winces. This is fucking ridiculous. The anger in him rises, flooding his chest and lighting his blood on fire. He shoves Steve roughly backwards, away from the black tar he's so terrified of, and steps forward to inspect it.

"No!" Steve yells, lunging for him at the same time Billy crouches down.

Several things happen at once. Billy stumbles forward—because *some idiot* just lunged into his back—and falls into the goo. A screeching sound fills Billy's ears, and it takes him a few seconds to realise it's coming from the goo. Then, it explodes.

It feels like feathers. Then, Billy is choking, doubled over and coughing as the feather-things strangle in his throat. He manages to spit them up, almost vomiting as his lungs protest and try to cough up every last one of what he now realises are spores.

When he can breathe again, he stares down at the goo-covered spores in horror. There are no more floating in the air, but he can't guarantee he didn't swallow some, and now that he's paying attention, he realises Steve got hit with a face full of them too.

He turns to see if Steve is all right, but Steve is already stumbling away from him and the goo-spores, horror written across his face.

“Harring—” Billy begins, but Steve points straight at him with a shaking finger, cutting him off.

“Hargrove,” Steve says slowly. “I’m going to goddamn kill you.”

Then, he turns around and runs back towards the road, leaving Billy to scramble to his feet and follow behind before he's lost in the woods for good.

—

Fucking Billy Hargrove. Steve kicks at his covers, pushing them away. Why is it always Billy? And what the fuck was he doing in the woods? Was he just following Steve around like some kind of creep?

Steve rolls onto his side and groans. It feels like someone's playing a frenzied game of one on one inside his skull. He shifts and there goes the ball—dribble, dribble, dribble—and a wave of something cold-hot washes through him.

It had started as an odd pressure at the base of his skull when he walked away from Billy, anger and fear warring inside him, still

feeling like he was being choked by those spores. He should have gone to Hopper straight away but he'd been too annoyed and embarrassed, besides. It wasn't until later, when the aspirin he'd downed did nothing to soothe his mounting headache, and the pain kept growing until his vision swam, that he realised that the spores had done something. That the spores had made him sick. And if he's sick, maybe Billy is sick, too.

He stumbles to his feet, fighting down the urge to puke, and pulls his jeans on. He told Billy he was going to kill him and he intends to make good on that promise. If he doesn't pass out first.

But it's not fantasies of homicide that spur Steve down the dark stairs and out of his empty house. It's an unbearable urge to *see* Billy. To be near him. Fuck.

By the time he gets to his car, his shirt and sweater are sticking uncomfortably to his skin with the cold sweat that covers his body. The fabric feels too heavy, and he's shaking all over. He braces himself against the car for a moment, sucks in deep breaths of cold air, then opens the door.

He shouldn't drive feeling like this but he can't walk all the way to Billy's. So he jams his keys into the ignition and pulls out of his driveway. Houses and trees fly by his window as he presses his foot to the accelerator. Moonlight washes the world in silver; it's too bright, though, the sound of the asphalt rushing beneath the chassis too loud.

But he has to get to Billy. Has to be near him. No no no. Has to *kill him* for getting Steve into this mess in the first place. Has to make sure Billy's okay.

It's not long before he turns onto Cherry Road and he brings the car to a halt two houses down from Billy's. He cuts the ignition and rests his head against the steering wheel. It doesn't feel like his skull's being split open anymore but it still hurts.

He gets out of the car, shutting the door too forcefully, the sound echoing in the slumbering street, and staggers to Billy's house. Billy's bedroom is at the front, Steve remembers from picking Max up once.

He'd peered curiously into the crack of the opened door before a glaring blue eye appeared and the door had been slammed shut. So, if his room is at the front, the front window must be his. At least, Steve hopes it is, as he raises his hand to knock.

But before his knuckles can make contact the window flies open. Steve steps back, hoping a believable excuse will trip from his tongue, but Billy is staring out at him from his dark room, and Steve can't say anything. Billy's got one hand on the window ledge, seems ready to hoist himself over, and he looks as surprised as Steve feels.

It's Billy who finally speaks, choking out an incredulous, "Harrington?" His face is ashen in the moonlight and his hair is matted.

Steve nods stupidly. His head feels clearer—the aspirin must have finally worked—and his stomach has stopped churning. But his tongue is still frozen.

"What are you doing here?"

"I had a headache," Steve says.

Billy blinks back at him, his brow furrowing. "Okay?"

Steve presses his lips together. "Can I come in? I need to talk to you." He might feel better and maybe the spores weren't to blame, after all, but if something happens— Steve shakes his head.

Billy drums his fingers on the window ledge, casts a look back over his shoulder, then he nods. He doesn't hold out a hand to help Steve, barely moves aside to make room, so when Steve manages to hoist himself over the ledge, finding not solid ground beneath his feet but a soft mattress, he falls backwards, bringing Billy down with him.

"Well done," Billy says, pushing himself up and away from Steve.

Steve huffs, but he's not annoyed. He *should* be annoyed, but he only feels relieved. Weird. He watches as Billy crosses the room and flicks on a lamp, gloom swallowed by warm light.

Billy stands with his hip cocked, by some kind of makeshift vanity,

shadows playing over his face.

There is an uncomfortable feeling starting to settle in Steve's chest and, without thinking, he stands and crosses the room. Stops close by Billy.

Billy shifts his weight and looks up at Steve. "OK, talk."

"Huh?"

"You said you needed to talk," Billy says slowly, "so talk."

Steve isn't sure what to say, now that he's faced with it. His headache is gone and Billy seems fine, so maybe he doesn't need to explain after all. But if there is something wrong, doesn't Billy deserve to know? So he turns to Billy and says, "Imagine this world is upside down."

When Steve's finished explaining Billy is staring at him with a look so blank Steve is certain it's hiding something. He doesn't want to think what it might be.

Eventually Billy says, "You're not yanking my chain, are you?"

Steve shakes his head.

Billy doesn't move but somehow he seems to crumple, deflate, suddenly looking as bone-deep exhausted as Steve feels. His usually square shoulders sag and he says, "So, what do we do?"

"Well, my headache's gone and you said you feel fine so—"

"I lied."

"Huh?"

"I had a headache, too." Billy taps his temple. "It was like someone drilling away in there."

Steve runs a hand through his hair and starts to pace. "OK, OK, well if we feel fine now we can wait until morning, right?" He pauses and turns to Billy.



"How the fuck should I know?" Billy hisses. He stalks toward Steve, fists a hand in his sweater. "You dropped me in this, you figure it out."

"I—?" Steve gapes, curls his hand around Billy's wrist. " *You* were following *me*. It's your fault," he says, just a little too loud.

Billy claps his other hand over Steve's mouth. "Keep it down. You'll wake everyone up."

Steve fights the childish urge to lick Billy's palm and just nods. "Sorry," he says, when Billy removes his hand. "We'll wait until morning. I know someone who can help." He straightens out his sweater. "I'll pick you up."

"No," Billy says, sharply. He breathes out through his nose. "I'll come to you."

"OK, fine," Steve says. "Just be early."

Billy rolls his eyes. "Bright and," he says, ushering Steve toward the window.

Steve climbs back out, wobbling a little before he finds his footing, and turns.

Billy is staring at him from the other side of the window, face inscrutable.

Steve gives a small, awkward wave and says, "I'll see you in the morning," and walks back toward his car. He makes it to the letterbox and then he stumbles. All his breath leaves him in a rush. The headache's back and it's even worse than before. Worse than when Billy had kicked the shit out of him.

A strangled groan works its way out of Steve as he turns back. Billy is leaning out the window, face as white as a ghost. Oh no, Steve thinks, and shuffles back toward him at the same time Billy clambers out of the window. They meet halfway, standing close enough that Steve can feel Billy breathing. But he feels better, pain gone, like it was never there at all.

"My headache's gone," Steve says, an awful kind of realisation dawning. "Now that...now that we're near each other again."

Billy's eyes are wide. "Well, shit."

"You too?"

Billy nods. "Guess we're stuck with each other."

"Guess so," Steve says. He lets out a long breath. What the fuck are they going to do? They can't go to Hopper now. Not like...this.

A cold wind blows past and Billy shivers. The words *He likes it cold* float through Steve's mind and an idea begins to form. He looks at Billy. "I have an idea," Steve says. "Come with me."

—

Billy has always been a smart kid, which is why, when they both work out why their headaches have gone away, it only takes a second for him to understand precisely how fucked he is. See, this feeling is all too familiar. He's amazed it took him so long to recognise it. The ache in his chest, the tension headache and rising irritation, the pull somewhere below his navel that only eases when he's standing right beside Steve—he feels this all the time. It isn't normally so potent, but he knows it nonetheless, because he always feels it when he isn't with Steve.

It's called missing someone. And it's fucking pathetic.

Billy has never heard of this Upside Down shit before tonight, but he knows, somewhere deep down inside, that it's messing with his head. After he got a face full of other dimensional gunk, he was obviously worried—first about himself, and then about Steve. It started off normal, but then the worry began to overtake him until it was all he could think of. Then the headaches started, followed quickly by the irrepressible urge to be near Steve, like anxiety in overdrive.

He still doesn't totally understand what this curse is doing, but he knows this much: it's taking the things he feels—his emotions, the

ones he tries to shove far away—and making it so he can't ignore them.

And perhaps that would be okay, except apparently it isn't just affecting him; it's affecting both of them. This curse, or virus, or whatever the hell Steve is calling it is making them both feel what Billy feels. Or some approximation of what Billy feels, at least. Steve won't have all the emotional junk that comes with it, but he feels like shit when he's not with Billy and that's worrying enough.

Steve parked a few houses down, which was smart. Billy is glad he doesn't have to risk Neil looking out the window and seeing him drive off in some boy's car in the middle of the night. They never say it out loud, but he knows Neil suspects. The only reason Neil doesn't know for sure is because Billy is so goddamn careful he sometimes wonders which is real—the constant lie, or the buried truth.

The air is crisp on his face, and he welcomes the slight sting of the breeze. It counters the growing sense of rightness he feels every second he is with Steve, like digging your nails into your palm to wake up from a dream. He hopes it will keep him from doing something stupid. Something like noticing how perfect Steve's face looks when it's bathed in moonlight, or how Steve's eyes are darker than Billy thought they could be; that is, until Steve looks up and they suddenly overflow with stars.

Billy folds his arms tighter across his chest and looks down at the ground. He can feel Steve turn towards him, and for a panicked second he wonders if this virus thing is making Steve feel *everything* he's feeling. But he shoves the thought aside because it's useless at best and devastating no matter which way he looks at it.

"You're not wearing a jacket," Steve says, frowning.

Billy looks up in time to see Steve make this aborted gesture to shrug off his coat, almost second nature, like he's done it a thousand times before for a thousand different girlfriends. Billy's heart stops, but Steve has already turned away, quickening his pace with his shoulders hunched up around his ears. They reach the car in silence, but Billy notices Steve turns the heat up full blast the second the engine is warm.

That's another problem with this curse; now that it's making Billy's feelings so much stronger, he can no longer ignore the obvious. When Billy stands beside Steve, everything falls away—the pain, the restlessness—and is replaced by a sense of calm more intoxicating than anything he's ever felt before. The difference is so stark, it's almost as if they cross some invisible line the second they're within three feet of each other. Like the world was in black and white, all harsh edges and jagged lines, and suddenly it blooms into colour and makes him feel at peace.

Billy needs it to stop before Steve figures out what's happening, and before it turns him into any more of a lame fucking sap than he's apparently already becoming.

The moon breaks free from behind a cloud, and Steve pulls away from the curb. There is something transformative about the world after midnight. It feels like anything could happen, anything could change. Along with the growing calm and the warmth spreading through him from the car's heater, it's making Billy feel reckless. Like maybe he has a shot at something he could never possibly win.

He clears his throat and speaks. Breaks the silence before he can try to win it anyway. "How did you know coming over would make the..." He taps his head. "You know. Go away."

Steve glances at him and then back at the road. The world floats by in black and white.

"I didn't actually," he admits. "I kind of just wanted to yell at you. You know, for being a total dickhead and getting us in this mess in the first place. And then I just wanted—" he cuts himself off, eyes wide. Clears his throat. "Yeah. That's it."

Billy stares at him for several seconds, that butterfly feeling starting up again in his stomach. The recklessness is rising; he blames the moonlight.

"You didn't yell," Billy points out.

"Well, no." Steve pulls a face. "Got a bit distracted with the whole..." he gestures vaguely to himself and to Billy.

“Yeah,” Billy agrees, not entirely knowing what he’s agreeing to.

“Yeah.”

It’s the stupidest conversation Billy has ever had, but the butterflies are rising and this giddiness is starting up in his chest, spreading through him until he feels like he has to jump or move or say something before it makes him explode. Maybe he should punch something instead.

He does neither, instead leaning his head against the window, closing his eyes and clenching his fists for the whole rest of the drive to Steve’s.

When they get out, he waits to be led to a bedroom window, smuggled inside like a secret Billy wishes were real, but Steve just walks up to the front door and lets himself in. Doesn’t even bother to be quiet.

“No one’s home,” Steve explains, his face covered in shadow as he holds the door open and waits for Billy to come inside.

Something about the way he is standing makes Billy bite back the harsh words on the tip of his tongue. He walks into the dark, empty house and follows Steve up the stairs to his bedroom.

All his good intentions abandon him the second he sees Steve’s wallpaper.

“Holy shit,” he breathes, standing in the centre of the room and turning in a slow circle. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Steve props his hands on his hips and glares at him. “What?”

Billy doesn’t know where to begin. “You got a hard on for plaid or something?” He grins at Steve, running his tongue along his teeth. “Don’t worry, I won’t tell.”

Steve rolls his eyes and walks over to the cupboard, turning up the thermostat as he goes. Billy feels a jabbing pain in his temple and follows quickly behind.

“You better not snore,” Steve warns him, dumping piles of blankets in his arms. “And I swear to god if you pull any funny shit in the night —”

Ice runs down Billy’s spine. He knew there was no chance Steve would ever go for guys, but to hear him say it like that still fucking hurts.

“—like sticking my hand in warm water or something, I really will kill you.”

Oh. Steve wasn’t talking about that at all. The ice is replaced by warmth and a hint of those familiar butterflies.

He knows he shouldn’t push it, but fuck, he wants to, and Billy has never been known to have good impulse control. He grins, trying to at least tone down the purr in his voice but failing dismally.

“Promise I’ll keep my hands to myself.”

Steve shoots him a look, one eyebrow raised and accompanied by a wry twitch of his lips. “Good boy.”

The smile falls from Billy’s face. God, he’s so screwed.

He turns away and begins arranging his bedding on the floor. Maybe if he just focuses on sleeping, the rest will go away.

He dumps half the blankets and picks out one of them. “How cold do you think I get, Harrington?” he asks, shaking his head. “I’ll suffocate under all these.”

Steve clears his throat. “See, that’s the thing. I don’t think we should tell anyone about this just yet, and when Will was infected, they flushed it out with heat. So, I thought...”

Billy connects the dots. “That’s why you’ve turned the thermostat up so high.”

Steve sighs, a line of sweat already forming on his brow. “Yeah.”

Now all Billy can imagine is Steve without a shirt on, sweat glistening

on his collarbone as Billy—

He stops that thought before it begins. They don't speak after that; there's nothing to say. Billy swaddles himself in enough blankets to cover a small army, and Steve does the same in the bed beside him. Billy is glad he can't see him from his position on the floor. He doesn't need to know what Steve looks like asleep.

He leans back onto the pillow, and that's when it starts—a slow, persistent throbbing at the base of his skull. Just like before.

“You're fucking kidding me,” he hears Steve mutter.

Billy sits up. The ache fades.

“The ground is too far away,” Billy says flatly, knowing where this leads and refusing to be the one to say it.

He gets it now; the Upside Down—or the Mind Flayer, if that's who is behind this—is a master tormentor. There's no other way to explain how this curse is designed to destroy him so perfectly without ever drawing blood.

Steve sighs. Pauses. “There's room up here.”

Billy is already standing. He crosses the distance between them and, against all known laws of the universe, climbs into bed with Steve Harrington.

The blankets settle around them, and Steve's bed is *small*. There's room for two, if the two are the kind of people who don't mind sharing a bed. When Steve breathes, the blankets lift, and when he shifts position, Billy can feel the brush of skin against his own.

Well, if nothing else, it's definitely warmer.

—

If hell is real, then Steve is certain he's in it right now. It's hot enough, at least, with the thermostat up above 80 and about a

hundred pounds of blankets weighing down on him. But that heat is nothing compared to the warmth of Billy lying close beside him, the whoosh of his breath—in and out, in and out—and the brush of his wrist or his ankle or his knee against Steve’s whenever he moves. Which is a lot.

“Quit wriggling,” Steve says.

“I told you I’d suffocate under all these blankets,” Billy says, wriggling again as he frees his arms. On a normal night it would let cool air into the cocoon of Steve’s bed but tonight it brings no relief. Then again, on a normal night Billy wouldn’t be here at all.

Steve’s stomach flip-flops and he tugs the blankets back up to his chin. “Well can you suffocate quietly? Some of us are trying to sleep.”

Billy huffs and rolls onto his side, facing away from Steve. Steve follows the movement unconsciously, silently cursing himself when he realises what he’s done. His hand rests on the mattress by Billy’s shoulder. If Steve moves his finger half an inch, he could touch Billy. He jerks his hand back, curling it against his chest, and presses his face into the pillow.

Steve doesn’t know exactly what those spores did but they seem to be twisting and intensifying what he feels. Billy always makes him feel some kind of fucked up—he likes being near Billy, but he doesn’t *want* to like being near Billy, hates how much he thinks about Billy when he’s not around—but now it is literal agony when Billy’s not near him. And it’s messing with Billy, too. Making Billy feel Steve’s pain.

Hell, Steve thinks. He’s in hell. There is no way this could get worse. Of course, that’s when it does.

He squirms and lets out a long breath. “I need to pee.”

“Good for you,” Billy says, voice muffled.

Steve’s face is hot and it’s not just from the mountain of blankets. “You’ll have to come with me.”

There’s a moment of awkward silence before Billy says, “What? Need



mommy to hold your hand?"

"Fuck this," Steve mutters and throws the blankets off, getting out of bed. Dealing with a headache is better than this humiliation. He only makes it to his door before blinding pain splinters through him. His knees buckle and he catches himself on the door frame.

From the bed he hears Billy gasp out, "Son of a bitch," and then he's by Steve's side and everything is okay again. "You made your point," Billy says, voiced strained. "Let's get this over with."

Steve leads Billy out into the hall, down to the bathroom and flicks on the light. When Billy makes to move past Steve he stops him with a hand to his shoulder. "What are you doing?"

"It might be too far if I stay outside," Billy says, like Steve is stupid. "But, hey, if you want to clean my puke up, knock yourself out." He tilts his head. "Probably literally."

Steve groans and says, "Fine," letting Billy past him and into the bathroom. It's big but it feels claustrophobic, right now. "Just...don't look," he says, and immediately regrets it.

Billy snorts. "Don't flatter yourself," he says, voice strange.

Steve turns away, tries to forget Billy is behind him, but it's impossible when he can hear Billy rummage through his cabinets, picking things up and murmuring to himself. It's mostly inaudible, which surprises Steve because Billy seems to take every opportunity he can to make fun of him. But then he barks out a laugh and says, "Why have you got a hundred cans of hairspray?"

Steve's face heats. "I suppose your hair just stays like that naturally?"

"I don't use *Farrah Fawcett* hairspray," Billy says, sounding genuinely amused.

Steve flushes the toilet and turns, swiping the can of hairspray Billy is holding. He shoves it back in the cabinet and shuts the door. "Shut up," he says, though the annoyance he feels is kind of distant, muted. It's second nature to react like this to Billy, even when the usual wave of irritation laced with something Steve doesn't want to put a

name to is dulled beneath a layer of a feeling Steve can only identify as warm.

Billy just smirks, leaning back against the sink.

Steve rolls his eyes and washes his hands, trying to ignore how Billy's shirt is clinging to him, sweat making the white fabric see-through. He swallows thickly. "Let's go back to bed," he says, "unless you need to..." He gestures to the toilet.

"I'm good," Billy says and pushes off the sink. He shoves past Steve and they walk back to Steve's room, shoulder to shoulder. Each time their hands brush, little sparks of electricity skitter along Steve's arm.

They have to part when they get to Steve's room, to get into their opposite sides of the bed, and Steve feels a piercing sensation that starts somewhere behind his left eye socket and shoots straight down to his toes, leaving a trail of burning in its wake.

"It's getting worse, isn't it?" Steve chokes out, crawling into bed. He lies on his stomach, pressing his forehead into his pillow. He sucks in deep breaths. The pain is gone, now that they're lying side by side, but he's still shaking all over.

"Yeah," Billy says, "I think it is."

"Fuck." Steve pulls the blankets up around him. "Maybe we can sleep it off." He's not sure if his plan to sweat it out is working but he doesn't know what else to do.

"Yeah," Billy repeats and rolls over. "Night, Harrington."

"Good night," Steve says, wondering how he will ever fall asleep but, somehow, he manages. His dreams are filled with Billy and he wakes with his stomach swarming with butterflies. He's lying on his side, facing Billy. The back of his hand is pressed against Billy's wrist, that small point of contact making him warmer than any blanket could.

Billy is staring at Steve, an intensity in his gaze that steals Steve's breath away. The air feels charged with something. But then Billy says, "I'm hungry. You gonna feed me, or what?" and the moment shatters.

—

Billy was right; he really doesn't need to know what Steve looks like asleep. It turns out, Steve's face does this thing where it relaxes so much, it's like he's an entirely different person. Billy wonders how much of Steve Harrington is held together with anxiety and determination, and that's not a good thing to wonder when you're close enough to kiss someone. At least, not when kissing them would transform this surreal truce into something that more closely resembles train wrecks and buildings going up in flames.

Steve's eyelashes are even longer up close, and his lips part a little when he's dreaming. He doesn't twitch or snore or do any other embarrassing thing that Billy could focus on. Instead, he just lies there, facing Billy, his breath soft and warm between them. That is, until Billy ruins it by forgetting to look at his eyes instead of his fucking lips, and Steve wakes up and catches him in the act.

He draws attention away from their sleeping arrangements by insisting on breakfast, and soon they are downstairs in Steve's kitchen. Steve looks a little lost in there, like he doesn't know what to do, and at first Billy thinks *rich kid*, but something makes him look closer.

Maybe it's just because he's been forced to spend a solid eight hours alongside someone whose friendship Billy usually self-sabotages in under twenty minutes, but he's starting to notice things about Steve. Like the way he never quite knows what to do with his hands, and how he constantly flicks glances back at Billy before opening up another cupboard at random.

"I normally just eat Eggos," Steve finally admits, lifting his hands in a little self-deprecating shrug before placing them on his hips and staring at the fridge. Which is closed.

"Eggos are fine," Billy says, hoisting himself up to perch on the edge of the bench, legs swinging.

He thinks he gets it now. Steve is self-conscious, on show to someone

he would never normally let into his inner circle. The reminder grates on Billy's last nerves, and he has very few of them left.

Steve nods, spins in a small circle, nods again. "Right." Finally retrieves the Eggos from the fridge.

Irritation swells in Billy's chest, hot and familiar. Steve doesn't want him here, but Billy can't leave, and so he's left with the painful, visceral awareness that he is here and he is unwanted.

He jumps down from the bench and wanders over to the fridge. He feels Steve's eyes on him as he opens it up and helps himself to the juice, drinking straight from the carton, and he just doesn't give a shit. He *can't* give a shit. Caring leads straight to heartache, and Billy can't afford to break when he's stuck to Steve's side like a parasite.

Something twists in his chest, and he freezes. That isn't good. He's usually so skilled at blocking off his feelings, transforming them into rock inside him. The twisting feeling swells, spreading through him like barbed wire, snagging on his lungs and throat. It hurts, god it hurts, but he forces his face to remain expressionless; he can at least still do that.

It must be the virus. Not content with turning his feelings into something physical, it's stopping him from blocking them off too. His tried and true method of ignoring them is failing.

He shoves the carton back in the fridge and closes the door, smacking his forehead against it and just leaning there. Fuck this virus. Fuck the Upside Down. Fuck Steve Harrington most of all.

Billy turns back around to see Steve watching him cautiously, a plate of Eggos held out in front of him like a peace offering. Billy stares at the plate. The twisting thing fades, but something worse rises up in its place. It's warm and gentle, spreading through him all the way to his fingertips. It feels like hope.

He snatches the plate and mutters something. It might be thanks, he isn't sure; his brain has detached from the rest of him.

What the hell is wrong with him? He's always known he can't think

straight around Steve Harrington, but this is beyond a joke.

He studies Steve while he eats, searching for signs that Steve is feeling the same weirdness that Billy is feeling, but he looks fine. Whatever it is that's making Steve share Billy's longing to stay together doesn't seem to extend to Billy's other emotions, which is a relief.

He stares down at his food, mind racing as he begins to wonder how the curse works. He'd thought it was amplifying what he felt and then mirroring it in Steve, but now he's not so sure. It's clearly doing the first one, but there hasn't really been a sign of the second since last night, when Steve turned up at his window just as Billy couldn't stand being away from him any longer.

But then, they still can't move more than three feet away from each other, and why else would Steve feel like that?

Whatever this virus is, Billy is coming to one, simple conclusion: he needs to get rid of it, fast. Whether it's sharing all of his emotions with Steve, or just some of them, it's still going to end up in the same place. Soon, Steve is going to learn how Billy really feels—about Steve, about the world, about everything.

And there is no way that can end well.

—

Steve is starting to get the feeling that there's more to the virus than they had first thought. Maybe it wasn't merely chance that it exploded over him and Billy. Maybe it wouldn't have happened if someone else had been there with him. Maybe its purpose is to drive him crazy, tear him apart.

Because Billy Hargrove is clearly designed to get under Steve's skin in every way possible. He's rude, obnoxious, he never sits still, his eyes are the stupidest shade of blue, and he has an alarmingly cute nose. And, it turns out, he is also a gigantic brat.

"This show sucks," Billy says, changing channels. Again. "All these

shows suck.” He keeps surfing though, cycling through the same channels over and over, images flashing so fast that Steve starts to feel queasy.

Steve swipes the remote from Billy and turns the TV off. “Quit that.” He shoves the remote down the side of the couch and sits on his hands so he doesn’t do something like punch Billy in that irritating, pretty face of his.

Billy huffs and slumps back on the couch, bouncing his knee. “If you didn’t have such a shitty VHS collection we could watch a movie while we do...whatever we’re doing.” He shifts, his knee knocking Steve’s. “ So, what is your plan, now? We stay close to each other forever and hope no one notices?”

Steve grits his teeth. “I thought I’d see if killing you might cure it, actually.”

Billy opens his mouth, eyes narrowed, but before he can say anything else the doorbell rings.

“Shit,” Steve murmurs. He sits up straight, glad that the television is off. “Maybe we can ignore it.”

“Fine by me,” Billy says, a faint tinge of pink rising to his cheeks. “Like I want anyone knowing I’m here.”

Steve rolls his eyes. The doorbell rings again, followed quickly by knocking and someone yelling, “Steve? Are you home?”

It’s Dustin. Steve stands and makes an aborted move to go to the door, but Billy remains sitting. “Come on,” Steve says. When Billy doesn’t move, he adds, “It’s Dustin.”

“So? You said to ignore it,” Billy says, glaring up at Steve. “He’ll go away eventually.”

“Dustin? Yeah, to call Hopper and have him break the door down.”

“You have a weird relationship with that kid.”

“He’s my friend. You know what those are, right?”

“Fuck off.”

Steve huffs and walks toward the door, leaving Billy no choice but to follow him. “Just keep behind me. I’ll get rid of him.”

Dustin pounds on the door. “Steve? Are you dead in there?”

Cold air washes over Steve when he opens the door, shoving Billy behind him. Dustin is standing on the front step, looking about two seconds from getting out his walkie-talkie and calling for help. “Hey, buddy,” Steve says, a little too loud. “What’s going on?”

Dustin’s brows raise. “Uh. You were meant to pick me up for the movies. Remember?”

Steve runs a hand over his face. “Shit, I forgot, I’m sorry.”

“It’s OK. There’s still time.”

“Actually, I can’t anymore,” Steve says and feels like a jerk when Dustin’s face falls.

“Why not?” A car drives past and a cold breeze stirs the leaves on the Harrington’s front lawn.

“Well, something’s come up,” Steve says, fumbling for an excuse.

“But you promised me weeks ago,” Dustin says, voice full of accusation and disappointment.

“I know, but—” How the hell is Steve meant to explain? Say he can’t take Dustin to the movies because he got hit with some weird goo from the Upside Down and it made that itch he has to be near Billy a million times worse? Even if he leaves out some of the details, Dustin will go to Hopper and Hopper or someone else will figure it all out. And then they’ll know how Steve feels. Billy will know how he feels.

Before he can think of an explanation that doesn’t involve any kind of feelings, Billy moves out from behind him and says, “He’s busy, OK? So, get lost.”

“What’s he doing here?” Dustin glares at Billy.

Steve blinks. "He's, uh, tutoring me?"

Dustin scoffs. "In what? How to be a psycho?"

Before Steve can answer, Billy says, "No, biology," in a way that makes Steve flush.

Dustin frowns. He steps forward and Steve panics.

"Look, it's a really important test," Steve says, mind racing. His stomach does a slow, twisting turn at the lie. "And I didn't tell you because I was...embarrassed." That he's embarrassed is true, at least. He doesn't want anyone to know he can't leave Billy Hargrove's side because it physically hurts. "I'll make it up to you next weekend. I promise. But we have to study today."

"Maybe I shouldn't leave you alone with him," Dustin says, eyes narrowed in Billy's direction.

Billy doesn't help by leaning against the door like he owns the place, that insufferable smirk tilting his mouth.

Steve sighs. "I'll be fine."

Dustin doesn't look entirely convinced but, after extracting a promise from Steve to call him so he knows Billy hasn't murdered him, he leaves.

When Dustin is out of sight, Steve shuts the door, letting his head rest against it for a moment, then wheels around. He points a finger at Billy.

"You didn't have to be so rude."

"I wasn't rude."

"You told him to get lost."

"Whatever," Billy says, "we have bigger things to worry about."

"Don't 'whatever' me," Steve says, grabbing Billy's shoulder. Billy's right, they do have bigger things to worry about, but it doesn't mean



Billy gets to be an asshole to Dustin.

Billy jerks away. "Don't grab me." He shoves Steve.

Steve stumbles back, far enough that pressure starts to build in his head. "Then stop being an asshole," he says, advancing on Billy until they're toe to toe.

Billy glares up at him, tension in his frame, like he's ready to pounce. And then he does. He fists his hands in Steve's shirt, shoves him against the wall. The vase on the hall stand wobbles, teetering precariously, before it falls and rolls off to smash on the ground.

Something in Steve snaps. He doesn't remember the last time he felt this angry. His fingers dig into Billy's wrists, hard enough that he knows it could bruise, and shoves.

"You're a dead man, Harrington," Billy says, breath hot on Steve's face.

Steve shoves at Billy, following as Billy staggers back. "Just try me," he says. He's going to fucking destroy Billy.

Billy pulls his arm back, like he's going to punch Steve, and Steve is ready for it. *Wants* it.

And that's when something slides into place in Steve's mind. "Wait, stop. Stop." Steve pushes his hand into Billy's chest. He hadn't been sure until now, but as the words leave his mouth, he knows he's right. "We have to stop," he says, breathless with his realisation. "It wants us to fight."

—

Billy stumbles backwards, Steve's words breaking through the hazy fog of anger and sparking some long buried thread of logic. He steadies himself against the wall, running his free hand through his hair and trying to focus on anything that isn't killing Steve Harrington.

Jesus. Steve is right. Billy has been looking at this all wrong.

For a single, blinding second, he stops thinking only about himself, and he realises this isn't about him. It's about *them*. It's always been about them.

Steve said it right from the start, the Mind Flayer just wants to kill. It doesn't care about how they feel or about tormenting them; that's just a neat little side effect. All it wants is to destroy them and feed off the ashes. It probably saw them arguing in the woods yesterday and fed off their negativity or something. Marked them down as an easy target with a little entertainment on the side. Dinner and a show.

Billy wonders if the same thing would have happened if the Mind Flayer had seen any two people fighting, or if there is just something about him and Steve that makes them perfectly suited to destroy each other.

"You're right," he finally spits out, clenching his hands into fists by his side, trying not to imagine them connecting with Steve's stomach. "And it's working."

Steve laughs, the sound coming out a little hysterical. "You think?"

Billy closes his eyes. "So what is it doing, then? How does it work?" His voice grates like it's dragging over sandpaper.

"I don't know," Steve says flatly. "The only thing I know for sure is that everything I feel is so much bigger than it should be. I mean, you were a dick to Dustin, but it shouldn't have made me that fucking mad." He thunks his head back against the wall. His next words are quieter. "It shouldn't have made me want to hurt you like that."

"Yeah," Billy agrees.

He tries to think of something more to add, something to help them figure this thing out, but he's got nothing. With the way they were yelling at each other yesterday, it's no wonder the curse latched onto them. By amplifying what they feel, the curse should have had them killing each other within seconds. Joke's on the Upside Down though;

despite how it looks from the outside, Billy doesn't actually hate Steve Harrington. He very much does not hate Steve Harrington, and that tiny flaw—that small quirk in the system—is probably the only reason it took this long for them to be at each other's throats.

A new sensation swells up inside Billy's chest. It's large and overwhelming, and like a black hole it sucks every other emotion up inside until Billy can't even feel the rage anymore. This is hopeless. How can they fight something that lives inside them like this? How can they survive long enough to fix it, when every second they spend together brings them that much closer to killing each other, and every second they're apart destroys them?

Billy is so sick of these mind games; how many times has he seen them before, one way or another? They take how you feel and they twist it, use it against you. It's people like Tommy who pretend to be his friend for the status it gives them. It's the girls who fawn over him as if his bad attitude is an invitation instead of a warning label. It's his dad, who backs him into a corner until Billy lashes out, just so he can use that anger against him.

He's sick of it. He's sick of all of it, but most of all he's sick of himself and the way he can't break free of the anger long enough to just let it all the fuck go.

The sensation rises, and it's all Billy can feel. Steve slides down the wall and comes to sit on the floor, knees propped up in front of him. He scrubs a hand through his hair and then just leaves it there, head bowed and fingers clutching at the strands. He looks how Billy feels, and it brings a weird sort of clarity to the situation. Billy is sick of the mind games, sick of the twisted shit he can never win, and so he gives up trying and just says the truth.

"I don't want to hurt you."

Steve freezes, and when he looks up at Billy there is so much confusion and uncertainty in his eyes that it makes Billy's heart lurch.

Which is when the last of the dots connect. The curse isn't making Steve feel what Billy feels; it's amplifying what *each* of them feel. Independently. Which means that Steve feeling good when he's with

Billy is because...

... Steve feels good when he's with Billy.

His jaw drops, and he doesn't know what to say, doesn't know what to do with the information he's suddenly been given.

"I don't want to hurt you either," Steve says, his voice quiet.

Something changes. It's as if something is listening, waiting. Billy pushes away from the wall and nearly reaches for Steve, but he shoves his hands in his pockets at the last second.

"So let's fucking not then," he says to the wall above Steve's head. "Fuck the Upside Down and the Mind Flayer. It can't control us."

Steve stands slowly and puts his hands on his hips, grimacing a little. "It sort of can."

Billy shrugs, finally looking Steve in the eye. He sees something there he never noticed before. It makes him feel reckless all over again, and this time he doesn't want to control it.

"You got rid of it once."

"Yeah." Steve snorts. "With extreme heat."

"Exactly." Billy grins and runs his eyes up and down Steve's body, so that for once there is no misunderstanding what he really means. "So give me some heat, Harrington."

Steve bursts into laughter. "Give me some heat"? Seriously?"

His eyes are bright and carefree; it's a good look on him. And despite the laughter, he is taking a step closer, his gaze falling to Billy's lips.

Steve looks up at him again. "If I kiss you and the curse breaks, does that make you a fairytale princess?"

Billy chokes, eyes wide, before he starts laughing. "Whatever you say, Prince Charming."

He barely gets the words out before Steve is there, his hands roaming through Billy's hair as he pulls them together into a kiss. The world fades, and for the first time in a day, all that Billy feels is the thundering of his own heart. It doesn't change or overwhelm him like every other thought and feeling has done ever since he stumbled on that weird black goo; it's just there. It's just him.

He grins against Steve's mouth and tugs him closer, hands hooked into the waistband of Steve's jeans. He mouths against Steve's jaw and lower, to his neck, running his tongue and teeth across pale skin. It's utterly crazy, and Billy can't quite believe it's happening. He doesn't even need some weird other dimension curse to make his senses go nuts right now; they're doing perfectly well on their own. Laughter bubbles up inside him, coming out in the breathlessness of his smile, his kisses, until Steve is smiling against him too.

Suddenly, Billy breaks away, a sharp pain jabbing just below his abdomen. He clutches his stomach and stumbles backwards, just as Steve does the same. He feels like he's going to be sick, and not normal sick. It's like the worst kind of hangover mixed with sickness and food poisoning all in one.

"Are you—" he begins, but Steve is already nodding furiously, eyes wide.

They only panic for a second, before they shove past each other and race up the stairs to the bathroom.

—

"That doesn't usually happen when I kiss someone," Steve says. He's sitting on the bathroom floor, cool tiles at his back and beneath his palms. There's no pain, anymore, not from the curse at least. But his stomach muscles ache and he feels wrung out.

Across the room, Billy is slumped against the bathtub. He lets out a half-laugh-half-groan and says, "I fucking hope not."

Steve's pulse skips. "Yeah?"

"I don't want to puke my guts up every time we..." Billy trails off, cheeks colouring.

"Me either," Steve says, cutting off any lingering doubts Billy might have. Billy's small, disarmingly open smile, goes a long way to settle Steve's own doubts.

"You've still got a little—" Billy nods at Steve, pointing to the corner of his own lips.

Steve frowns and wipes the back of his hand across his mouth. It comes away streaked with black. "Gross," he says. He looks up at Billy, who is staring back at him, tired eyes twinkling. He's still infuriatingly attractive even though he's pasty and sweating and has spent the last twenty minutes vomiting black goo. But the way he's looking at Steve suggests he might be thinking the same thing about him. It suffuses Steve with warmth and he realises that, beneath the scowl, it's the same way Billy always looks at him. He just never noticed it before.

"That was a really good kiss" Steve says, with a small smile. He licks his lips. "Well, before the barfing."

"It was," Billy says. He stretches his leg out, pokes the sole of Steve's foot with his toe. "Why don't you get over here and we can try it again."

Steve raises a brow. "Why don't *you* get over here?"

Billy rolls his eyes but he crawls over to Steve, like a wild cat on the prowl, slotting himself between the sprawl of Steve's legs. "Yes, your majesty," he says, hands on Steve's thighs.

"I like the sound of that," Steve says. His pulse is racing. He rests his hands on Billy's forearms, stroking up to his shoulders, back down to circle his wrists.

"You're a dork." Billy leans forward but Steve stops him with a hand over his mouth. "What?" Billy says, voice muffled by Steve's palm.

"You can't kiss me, yet. I'm all pukey," Steve says, wrinkling his nose.

Billy shrugs. "So am I," he says. "And it's not puke. It's goo."

"Because that's better," Steve says, but he doesn't stop Billy when he leans in this time. Lets Billy kiss him, open-mouthed and hot. Doesn't shy away when Billy licks into his mouth, just leans up so he can pull Billy closer, arms tight around Billy's waist. Heat simmers beneath Steve's skin, buzzing pleasantly, but he's too tired to do anything more than kiss Billy. Maybe Billy feels the same because he pulls away, pressing one, then two, semi-chaste kisses to Steve's lips, before settling back on his heels.

Steve runs his hands up Billy's thighs, settling them on his hips. It occurs to him that this is the most ridiculous way for two people to get together. But, hell, it fits them. He chuckles.

"What?"

"My kiss *did* break the curse," Steve says, breathless, one hand cupping Billy's jaw. He lets it trail down Billy's neck to rest in the centre of Billy's chest. Feels Billy's heart thumping beneath his palm. "Which, I think we agreed, makes you a fairytale princess."

Billy groans, head tilting back.

"You're pretty enough to be a princess," Steve says, doing a poor job of concealing his smirk.

Billy lets out a low growl and says, "Shut *up*, Harrington," kissing Steve before he has a chance to say anything else.

Steve smiles into the kiss. He still feels all kinds of fucked up around Billy, but it's not so bad, now, knowing Billy feels the same.

### **Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading! <3 You can find gothyringwald on tumblr under the same name ([here](#)) and a moodboard for the fic [there](#) too. Socknonny is only reachable via smoke signal.